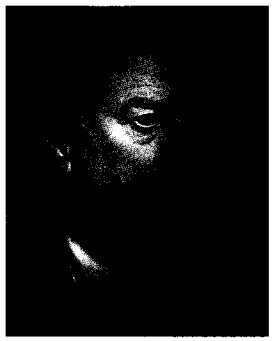
MEDICAL CENTER'S 'ANSWER MAN' SAYS GOODBYE

After three decades at the helm of Stanford Medical Center's News Bureau, Spyros Andreopoulos, founder of Stanford Medicine magazine, is retiring. He leaves a legacy of commitment to an open connection between medicine and the public via the press.



By Mary Madison

Portrait by Max Aguilera-Hellweg

What will health care reform mean to doctors and patients at Stanford University Medical Center?

ASK SPYROS.

What Stanford discoveries in immunology are helping to fight cancer and AIDS?

CALL SPYROS.

What is the cost of a private hospital room at Stanford Hospital?

When will the rate go up again and why?

ASK SPYROS.

Is Stanford wasting water in the fountains in front of the hospital?

Who takes care of the ducks that swim in the fountain lagoon?

CALL SPYROS.

Whether the questions are big or small, Spyros Andreopoulos has been the man with the answers at the medical center for 30 years. He has fielded questions from the media, reported Stanford's major medical discoveries, acted as the institution's official spokesman, and expressed his views on a variety of health care and biotechnology issues. ▪ Thanks to the eminence of Stanford scientists and physicians, and his job as director of the medical center news bureau and editor of *Stanford Medicine*, Andreopoulos reported some of the biggest breakthroughs of 20th century medicine to a worldwide audience. Typically garrulous and friendly, Andreopoulos can be stern and tough when fighting for open news coverage. He has become the institutional memory of the medical center, with an encyclopedic knowledge of the place. ▪ Now the answer man, whom some call the "conscience of the medical center," is leaving his post. Andreopoulos, 64, will retire August 31.

He's departing to devote more uninterrupted time to his favorite activity—writing novels and science articles. He admits that he will be glad to escape the bureaucratic maze of the medical center. "I prefer a small place, and Stanford has grown so big," he says.

Running the medical center these days seems to require a network of committees that spend hours discussing issues before deciding on plans of action, notes Andreopoulos. "Anyone in public relations must get involved with task forces and committees and try to satisfy all the parties. ...We are in a Balkanized state, though not as bad as Bosnia," he says. "In the old days we simply did our jobs. (Stanford President Gerhard) Casper is trying to break the committee habit, and I hope he succeeds."

Although Andreopoulos sees many committees as a waste of time, he has given a good account of himself in many groups, including the hospital board of directors. Andreopoulos is valuable to the board because of "his clear thinking, vision of the medical center and ability to understand the whole health care situation," says Palo Alto cardiologist Dr. Alfred Spivack, a Stanford clinical professor of medicine and member of the board since 1987.

Andreopoulos, a native of Athens, Greece, joined Stanford in 1963, just 10 years after he arrived in the United States as a journalism student. He was editor of the school paper and worked as a reporter at the *Wichita Beacon* to help with his expenses at the University of Kansas in Wichita. After graduating he continued working for the newspaper, and a series of articles he wrote while there led to his next career move. An editor at *Esquire* magazine noticed his stories on the "Menningers of Kansas," about the brothers who built a mecca for psychiatric research and training, and asked Andreopoulos to write an article for the magazine.

As a result the Menningers invited Andreopoulos to join their Foundation in Topeka as assistant director of information services and editor of *The Menninger Quarterly*.

Andreopoulos left the Menninger clinic, which was already well established when he arrived there, for Stanford med-

ical center, which was in a state of upheaval. The university had moved its medical school to the campus from San Francisco to open the medical center. The exotic design with spectacular fountains, huge hanging planters, big corridors and small rooms came under fire for looking more like the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi than a hospital, clinic and school. A turf war, never completely settled, erupted between community and faculty physicians. Many professors with the school in San Francisco refused to relocate.

"I'll never forget our first year here when we had virtually no patients," Andreopoulos says. "There were only 12,000 patient visits in the clinics that first year. Then Bob Alway, dean of the medical school, said to me, 'Your job is to make us famous.' Bob was a man of tough, direct methods, and he provided what a PR man needs most to succeed: He recruited a dazzling array of academic leaders for the top jobs."

By 1966, just three years later, patient visits had climbed to 140,000 per year. "Stanford had done the impossible," Andreopoulos says. "Early studies said there would never be enough patients in Palo Alto to support the school's teaching programs. Instead we got an unprecedented number of full-paying patients. Usually teaching hospitals must rely on indigent patients who can't pay."

Stanford's research discoveries and advances in clinical areas were already building its reputation, and Andreopoulos helped make the institution famous by his straightforward reporting of all the news. Stanford was lucky to have Andreopoulos to report the complex negotiations between the university and the city of Palo Alto from 1966 to 1968 when Stanford bought the city's share of the hospital, says Dr. Robert Glaser, who was vice president of medical affairs and dean of the medical school from 1965 to 1970, with a brief stint as acting university president in 1968. "The medical center was really created in that period," says Glaser.

Andreopoulos built a reputation for telling the truth without cover-up, no matter how awkward the consequences. He campaigned for openness in the face of some doctors, researchers and administrators who felt uncomfortable dealing with the media.

"By and large we won most of the battles here," he says. "The situations where we didn't showed that holding back the news doesn't work. You compound the problem if you don't tell the truth—you have to explain not only what the story was, but why you stonewalled."

In a talk last year at the annual meeting of the Association of American Medical Colleges Group on Public Affairs, Andreopoulos said, "During my 30 years of service at an academic health center I have become aware of how painfully difficult it is for an institution to report its transgressions as well as its triumphs. ... Only firm policy, firmly supported from the top, will enable an institution—more often than not—to resist temptation.

"To err is human and the public understands that, if you tell the truth," he adds. "In general, the administration has been supportive of the principle of openness. No one has favored secrecy. But I've worked for nine deans and acting deans and about 15 hospital administrators, so it has been a constant process of teaching newcomers about how the media work and the importance of being candid."

"Spyros has served as a conscience and a counselor and a great source of good common sense," says Arthur Kornberg, professor emeritus of biochemistry at Stanford. "He was not appreciated enough at either the medical center or the university by those who did not favor open news coverage." For example, Stanford's recent indirect cost controversy "could have been averted if people had listened to Spyros at an early stage," the Nobel laureate says. "If we had admitted the problem and promised to make restitution to the government, it all would have blown away. That was Spyros' advice."

One battle to tell the full story that Andreopoulos won was over an embarrassing event in the early 1970s. When Stanford built an extension to the existing hospital, one level was built higher than the other to save excavation costs. A ramp connecting the old and new buildings had to be installed at a "slight angle." Hospital staff soon found that the angle was too steep to allow a gurney carrying a patient to be safely rolled down the ramp after surgery.

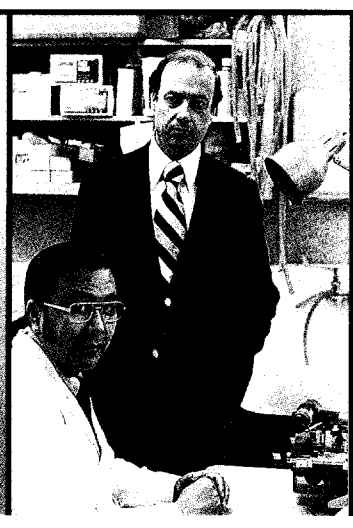
"Surgeons and anesthesiologists were appalled that their original objections to the plan were ignored," Andreopoulos says. "Transplant surgeon (Dr. Norman) Shumway said, 'These people don't understand the law of gravity—if you put patients on a downward slope on a gurney, they will go into shock with the blood rushing to their heads.' "

The *San Jose Mercury News* learned of the snafu and called Andreopoulos. He wanted to release the story, but administrators stalled, fearful of adverse publicity. "I held the story for a day. Then the *Merc* called again," says Andreopoulos, who went to the president's office for help.

"Stanford President Richard Lyman related through Vice President for Public

HIGHLIGHTS OF A PR MAN'S 30 YEARS

Andreopoulos at news conferences on early heart transplants (far left). With Mission Impossible's Peter Graves as fundraising chairman of American Cancer Society, on "Heart Beat" book jacket, and at famous Pajaro Dunes conference on academia-industry relationships (below left to right)



Affairs Bob Rosenzweig that we should release the story. When we gave the press the facts, the controversy ended."

A one-foot high elevator had to be constructed on which to raise and lower gurneys on and off the ramp. To the press, this is now known as the shortest ride in the Bay area, Andreopoulos notes with a laugh.

Andreopoulos has earned the gratitude of a host of medical stars who took his advice on press relations. Kornberg, co-winner of the 1959 Nobel Prize in medicine, listened to Andreopoulos when more than 100 reporters and photographers came to a 1967 press conference where he reported the latest finding on DNA.

"Spyros advised us not to say that DNA was the creation of life in a test tube and instead refer to it as a synthesis of the core of a virus," Kornberg says. "This was to avoid sensational accounts about creating a little monster in a test tube."

Another Stanford medical star who was a beneficiary of Andreopoulos' expertise was Shumway, who performed the first U.S. heart transplant in 1968. "Spyros was terrific" in arranging the huge press conference following the operation and keeping the media briefed on the patient's condition, Shumway remembers. "At the time there was no brain death law, so we were proceeding under guarded circumstances. Spyros kept things under control as only he could. He handled it beautifully."

ANDREOPOULOS SAYS that Shumway had hoped to keep the transplant operation under wraps for as long as possible, but the news leaked out when a donor suddenly became available. Nurses who were needed for the surgery were called out of a wedding reception. A reporter for the *San Jose Mercury News* who was also attending overheard the news and reported to his paper and the wire services that a heart transplant was imminent at Stanford.

"I was vacationing in Yosemite, but the hospital called me, and I raced back," Andreopoulos says. "We had 150 to 200 reporters here for two weeks, and I was on TV every day giving bulletins. We arranged it so that Shumway had to appear only once at the big press conference. Our office did all the other announcements."

Andreopoulos says that excessive publicity hurt transplant programs elsewhere by raising false hopes. But at Stanford, where there were no exaggerated claims, Shumway was able to continue performing the operations and achieved long survivals.

In spite of Stanford's straight reporting of the first heart transplant, the Santa Clara County Medical Society was "miffed because they thought we should get permission from them before discussing the transplant with reporters," Andreopoulos says. "That was the view of the medical profession in those days regarding the press," he says. "How things have changed today when medicine is marketed like refrigerators!"

Andreopoulos published an article in the *Archives of Surgery*, in response to the medical society's position. He wrote that reporting the heart transplant signaled a new era in medical/press relations. His comments were received by the media at large as a "bible of how to report breakthroughs," Andreopoulos says.

As medical research evolved, the rules for reporting discoveries had to be defined for scientists as well as for reporters. Andreopoulos tackled the growing problem of "Gene Cloning by Press Conference" in an article for the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1980. The question was whether scientists should report medical breakthroughs for the first time at a press conference or follow the traditional path of first publishing their results in a refereed journal. As the biotechnology revolution got under way the problem escalated. Researchers were competing to be the first to announce discoveries and get the jump on marketing their findings to the biotech industry where big money could be made.

Andreopoulos carefully analyzed the scientific claims of several "breakthroughs" reported at press conferences against the actual papers published several months later. He showed that the press conference claims were hollow. As a science writer in an academic institution, Andreopoulos said he felt bound by the tradition of announcing scientific advances in the lay press only after the work had been given the nod by researchers' peers—either published in refereed journals or presented at scientific conferences.

"Even then I do not always take the author's word about the importance of the work since investigators are likely to be either aggrandizing or self-effacing," he says. "I often send my manuscripts to key people, whose scientific and medical judgment I respect, for their opinions."

Dr. David Korn, dean of the medical school since 1984, calls Andreopoulos "the strong voice of conscience" over and over again. "He's trusted and respected by science writers all over the country," Korn says. "He doesn't shill; he tells the straight story."

David Perlman, nationally prominent science editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, considers Andreopoulos one of the top institutional PR men in the country. "He knows everything, he never put out anything that is not true, and he never puts words in anyone's mouth," Perlman says. "There's no hype about what is going on at Stanford."

Perlman recalls how Andreopoulos, working with Barbara Culliton, then an editor at *Science* magazine, persuaded scientists to open a crucial conference on DNA to the press in 1975. Researchers, including Biochemistry Professor Paul Berg, initially did not want reporters at the conference, fearing sensational accounts would result and fuel wild rumors already circulating about DNA research. Berg later was co-winner of the 1980 Nobel Prize in chemistry.

PERLMAN AND OTHER members of the press wanted to cover the conference because it would shed light on recombinant DNA, an exciting new field of science and medicine. The public had a right to know about the promise and the potential risks of genetic engineering, Perlman says. "Spyros used tremendous diplomacy to persuade the organizers that the media should be allowed to attend," Perlman says. "He negotiated a deal so the conference would be open to all reporters who would promise not to write anything until the conclusions and recommendations were presented."

Andreopoulos' co-workers appreciate him as much as his press contacts and news sources. He "worked night and day to do the best job of any medical center newsman" says Bob Beyers, the highly regarded head of the university's campus news service from 1961 to 1989. "He has an incredible ability to spot problems before they hit, and he intervened in numerous stories to prevent PR disasters."

Laura Hofstadter, science writer and editor in the medical center news bureau from 1977 to 1989, calls Andreopoulos "an old Bob Beyers type who wanted a real news operation rather than a glossy PR outfit.

"Sometimes it bogged the whole office down when he had to fight for his view of open reporting," Hofstadter adds. "A lot of administrators feel that the function of the news bureau is to put a positive spin on things. But Spyros thought it was important to present the facts and get as much information out as fast as possible."

Andreopoulos conducted his own national search for a successor and selected Don Gibbons, 38, who joined the news bureau staff last year. Gibbons, now associate director, was formerly editor in chief of *Medical World News*, a national magazine for physicians. "Spyros is such a font of information about this beast we call the Stanford medical center," Gibbons says. "I've been able to learn the medical center many times faster by being with him this year than I ever could on my own."

Andreopoulos will launch his Stanford retirement with a vacation this summer with his wife, Christiane. They will be able to spend more time with their daughter Sophie; her husband, Alan Fitch Jr.; and their baby granddaughter, Kelly Anne, who live in Los Altos. A workaholic for all of his 30 years at Stanford, Andreopoulos has often put Stanford and his career before everything else, says Christiane. In spite of the laugh that follows her comment, it's clear that she's only partly joking.

In addition to covering Stanford medical events, advising administrators and faculty, and writing articles for professional journals, Andreopoulos served as editor for four books published by the Sun Valley Forum on National Health, a nonprofit organization that specializes in health care policy. He will continue to work with the Forum after his retirement.

With Dr. Eugene Dong, associate professor of cardiothoracic surgery, Andreopoulos, co-authored the medical novel, "Heart Beat," which deals with misuses of medical technology. Andreopoulos is presently writing another novel, a thriller based on his experiences in Greece during World War II.

Never hesitating to express his opinion on controversial issues, Andreopoulos has also written several op-ed pieces, including one published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* last February in which he describes current examples of managed care as a "health care scam." He warns that unless sufficient regulatory constraints are adopted, managed competition will continue the present "medical arms race," with the health care and insurance industries the only winners. He suggested specific steps that could safeguard consumers.

Andreopoulos opened closed doors in the halls of science and medicine at Stanford and kept them open to public view. Looking back, he seems to most enjoy remembering the milestones in 20th century medicine that he reported to the world.

Among many such high points were the work of Kornberg and Berg on DNA; the research of Dr. Saul Rosenberg and the late Dr. Henry Kaplan who found successful treatments for Hodgkin's disease and other lymphomas; the pioneering work of Dr. Hugh McDevitt in immunology; groundbreaking studies in infectious diseases by Dr. Thomas Merigan; Shumway's heart transplants; discoveries in exobiology (life on other planets) by Dr. Joshua Lederberg, co-winner of the 1958 Nobel Prize in medicine; and the work of Dr. Stanley Cohen, whose discoveries gave birth to genetic engineering.

"Many more exciting things are coming," Andreopoulos says. "Every day you have even more to write about." **SM**

AUTHOR HAS BEEN ON CAMPUS SINCE THE BEGINNING

By Robert Tokunaga

For veteran journalist Mary Madison, writing a profile of Spyros Andreopoulos meant talking to former sources and competing reporters. "It was like 'old home' week," says the longtime reporter, who covered Stanford for 36 years for various newspapers and news wire services.

For Madison, who retired from the now defunct *Peninsula Times Tribune* in April of 1992 and is now a correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, doing stories on Stanford University Medical Center has always meant coming back to where it all began: not her journalism career, but the beginning of Madison's life on June 2, 1931.

The daughter of longtime newspaperman Charles Massey, who was managing editor of the *San Francisco News*, which ceased publication in the 1950s, and who later became night news editor of the *San Jose Mercury News*, Madison was the first girl and second baby born at the then newly completed Palo Alto Hospital, which would later become part of Stanford medical center.

After residing in nearby Burlingame, Madison came back down the Peninsula to attend Stanford University in 1949. After a stint as managing editor of the *Stanford Daily*, she graduated with a journalism degree in 1953 and worked as editor of a weekly in San Diego until coming back to the then *Palo Alto Times* in 1956. She recalls being the only woman reporter at the *Times* who wasn't writing in the society pages (commonly referred to back then as the women's section). It was there that she began covering her alma mater. One of her first major stories was the medical center's move from San Francisco to the Stanford campus.

In the 1960s Madison took time off to have three children, but she also stayed on the Stanford beat for most of the decade as a correspondent and stringer for the *San Francisco Examiner*. With the campus often exploding with anti-Vietnam War protests and other media events, Madison was writing stories almost daily, she remembers.

Stories about the medical center were often part of her beat, and that's how she met Andreopoulos. "He was a reporter's dream because no matter what the story—whether it was a good one about Stanford or a major problem concerning the university—you could always reach Spyros," Madison says, "and he would tell you exactly what the situation was.

"There was never any ducking or hedging with Spyros," she adds. Being accessible to the media—even when the university or medical center is not in a favorable light—is one of the important factors that make a good media relations person.

Andreopoulos was also a master at convincing media-shy physicians and researchers to come out of their ivory towers and talk to the lay media; especially in a language the average person could understand, Madison notes. In the past 20 or so years, it's become a lot easier to talk to medical researchers. This is probably due to the influence of media relations people like Andreopoulos and the growing importance of getting public support for government-funded research projects.

It was a joy doing a story on a man she saw in action for decades because she learned a lot about Andreopoulos that she didn't know when she was a reporter, says Madison, who worked as a stringer for UPI for most of the 1970s. She became a copy editor and reporter for the *Redwood City Tribune* in the mid-70s. The *Tribune* was combined with the *Palo Alto Times* in April 1979 when the company that owns the *Chicago Tribune* bought the two papers and turned them into the *Peninsula Times Tribune*, which was closed down in April of this year.

One of the endearing memories Madison has of Andreopoulos is his holding court before and after press conferences announcing major medical center news, such as the naming of a Stanford Nobel Prize winner. Andreopoulos would mingle among the reporters and mention points of interest that may not have come out at the press conference, recalls Madison, who won two first-place awards from the California Newspaper Publishing Association for stories she either wrote, co-wrote or edited.

"Someone like Spyros, who can translate medical and scientific terms into layman's language, is a godsend for most reporters, who don't usually have backgrounds in science or medicine," Madison says.